



THE VIEWS OF THE UZBEK PEOPLE ON THE FLORA AND ITS PROTECTION

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Article history:	Abstract:
<p>Received: 26th July 2023 Accepted: 28th August 2023 Published: 30th September 2023</p>	<p>This article reflects the ethnographic data on the imaginations and ceremonies of the Uzbek people related to the flora and its protection in the system of their traditional outlook and national value. The main focus of the article is to reveal the current manifestations of the folk views of the Uzbek people related to the flora and trees on the basis of religious, historical, and ethnographic materials.</p>
<p>Keywords: Central Asia, Uzbek people, flora, fruit trees, decorative trees, pomegranate, maple, "Avesta", ancient religious thoughts, Zoroastrianism, Islam, Buddhism, mythology, oikonyms, ecology.</p>	

It is known from history that the peoples of Central Asia worshiped various agrarian cults and local religious beliefs before Islam. This process did not lose its importance even in the later periods (Arab and Mongol invasions). However, after the religion of Islam was fully established in Central Asia, their attitudes towards the ancient religious thoughts and their forms in the traditional lifestyle of the local population faced to changes.

Particularly, the cultural monuments found in the territory of Central Asia indicate that the religious thoughts were rich and various in the life of the people of this region. The reason for such a diversity was the fact that the local population had been engaged in farming and animal husbandry for centuries, the changes of time, the migration of peoples, the beliefs of other ethnic groups, and the introduction of religious systems which were new for the region. - The processes of emergence and development of early religious thoughts can be seen directly in the example of various primary sources – petroglyphs, archaeological findings, written and oral narratives.

It is known that since ancient times, plants have been closely connected with the material history of mankind and have played an important role in people's daily life and household activities. Of course, they have been considered not only a source of raw materials for humans, but also an abundant food base for livestock. That is why people began to use different plant names as place names. Such names served as a specific goal in the farming and animal husbandry of tribes and peoples. In this way, the oikonyms appeared.

A group of oikonyms consists of terms created on the basis of names of plants and trees. Names of settlements named after plants and trees are called phytooikonyms. Phytooikonyms (from Greek "phytos" – plant) – reflect the type of plants and the important features of the flora of a certain region[1]. The origin of this type of place names dates back to ancient times. Toponyms such as Okterak, Olayogoch, Korayogoch[2] mentioned in Mahmud Koshgari's work "Devonu Lugatit Turk" are a clear proof of this idea.

Our ancestors considered planting trees and creating gardens as meritorious work. It is said that a person who plants a fruit tree will prosper in both worlds. There is also the following phrase about the reward of this work in the hadiths: "When you have a seedling in your hand with the intention of planting it, plant it if you can, even if it is clear that the doomsday will happen accidentally"[3].

According to a widespread tradition among the people of the Fergana Valley, everyone must contribute to the growth of plants on earth. One way to increase plants is to plant as many fruit and decorative trees as possible[4]. But, in its turn, in ancient times, it was allowed to plant only hedge plants on the banks of streams where drinking water flows, ponds and wells and planting fruit trees were strictly prohibited. After all, our ancestors realized through experience that if a piece of fruit fell into water and got rotten, germs that spread infectious diseases would appear[5].

It is also said in "Avesta": "Whoever sows wheat, he sows Ashah (Truth). He will raise the religion of Mazda again and again..." It is understood that the wheat grown by honest work turns into a power that repels all evil and tragedies, it is considered a harvest of goodness"[6].

Also, in the world mythology, special emphasis is given to the symbol of the "Garden" covered with plants and trees. For example, in the book "Encyclopedic Dictionary" by Alisher Navoi, it is written as follows: the word "Garden" in addition to its original meaning is widely used to express the meanings of the world, the hereafter, heaven, the

beauty of the lover, the lover's face yellowed from parting or with traces of bloody tears, the heart that falls into different state at a moment, as well as the essence of hope and mercy"[7].

In different ethnos of the world, the tree, like other plants, has the meanings such as flowering, abundance, eternity, fertility and life loving, as well as birth, growth, flowering, fruiting, yellowing, and falling leaves. Therefore, in literature and art, the image of a tree is always compared to human life[8].

Especially, the symbols of "World Tree", "Tree of Life" and "Tree of Anglam" are quite popular in the world mythology. In particular, the "Tree of Anglam" is close to the "Tree of Life" because it is a symbol of perfection, and sometimes merges with it. In Babylonian mythology told about the "Tree of Truth" and "Tree of Life" growing in the sky. In Buddhism, there is a Buddha tree (fig, it is also known as badji), and in the legends related to this religion, the Buddha sat in its shade and attained supreme status[9].

Also, the image of the sacred Bodhi tree, under which Buddha delivered his first sermons, is an artistic and religious symbol of Buddhism. The organization of the architectural complex determined the place and character of the relief paintings, sculptures and images created according to the strict laws in Buddhism.

The following items were found from the temple at Ayritom: a five-tiered clay chaitya with the symbol of the Buddha under a tree with ray, which was usually placed on a religious ritual vessel – a reliquary or served as the outer part of a stupa; and also a stone, on which a teenager holding a palmette-shaped flange was depicted, was found, apparently, he was a donator-temple servant[10].

According to a folklorist Sh. Turdimov, "garden" has symbolic meanings such as family, home, lover, meeting of lovers, a place of meeting, joys of life. If the whole existence is understood as a huge universe, "garden" is a model of a small universe[11]. Therefore, in the Uzbek people, creating gardens and taking care of them is a good deed for every person, as well as a meritorious deed[12].

There are many general similarities between the cultures of Central Asia and Mesopotamia. This is especially seen in the objects made of clay and the buildings made of soil. The wide spreading of self-supporting constructions such as domes, knobs, and arches in local traditional architecture was caused by the scarcity of trees in Central Asia. Juniper and maple trees have been considered sacred since ancient times. Sometimes there were cases of worshipping every supernatural looking tree.

Juniper and maple trees have been revered as objects of sacred power since ancient times, and by the time of Islam, these trees became the tombs of saints[13]. The girls told them the secrets of their hearts, tied a strip of cloth to the branches of the tree and hoped that their dreams would come true. In South Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the maple tree is highly revered. Turkmens are also afraid to burn and use dry branches of maple as firewood.

Worshipping trees was different in different nations. The theme of "Tree of Life" takes an important place in Uzbek folk crafts. In Islam, a sacred tree is associated with the name of a saint. The oasis of Feruza in Turkmenistan, which reaches forty meters in length, is famous for the maple trees "Seven Brothers".

In particular, in the four-meter hollow of a giant maple tree in Sayrob village, Boysun district, Surkhandarya region, there was even a madrasah once. This large hole in the trunk of two old maple trees was previously used as a soldiers' quarters, in 1920 as the office of the village council, in 1932-1934 as a library, in 1936 as a village store, a school, a tea house, and a barber shop. Now a wonderful museum has been established inside it. The maple is protected as a natural monument. Another noteworthy aspect is that you can not find anywhere else the spring that has been flowing under these maple trees and the black-and-white fish in it. Although there are holes through which spring water flows out, none of the hundreds of fish has left this place yet. The people of Boysun mention proudly that the great poet and statesman Babur had a rest under these maple trees[14]. In the village of Buruchmulla, near Tashkent, there is an endless stream of visitors to visit the big maple tree[15].

Among the Uzbek people, along with other plants, the pomegranate tree is mentioned with great respect, and it has been a symbol of blessing and fertility since ancient times. Therefore, there is a widespread belief among Uzbeks that "He, who does not drop a single seed of pomegranate fruit on the ground, will be blessed." Because, according to folk beliefs, the devil enters between the pomegranate seeds, and the person who eats it must eat it as much as possible without dropping a single seed on the ground[16].

People of some villages in the southern part of Central Asia believe that pomegranate helps in the birth of a child. In the process of weaving the image of a pomegranate tree into fabric, the embroiderer women want to express that it is a symbol of blessing and abundant harvest[17]. In addition, pomegranate has healing properties, which gives it the status of a divine fruit.

In some nations of the world, the pomegranate is a symbol of supreme authority, and its upper part resembles a crown. In the famous riddle "Pomegranate" by Jahon Otin Uvaysiy, its shape is like a dome, and the thin veil on the grains is like a veil on girls' faces. In Uzbek folk songs, the pomegranate is glorified as a symbol of a woman and fertility[18].

The symbols of pomegranate are originated from its color, shape, and abundance of seeds. In the ancient Greek tradition, this fruit is a symbol of fertility, flowering and marriage. Pomegranate symbolizes Persephone, daughter of Demeter, the wife of the ruler of Aid and the "goddess" of plants. According to the imagination of the ancient Greeks, the pomegranate grows from the blood of Dionysus, the god of fruit-bearing forces. Among the

Phoenicians, pomegranate is a symbol of life and the god of the sun, while in Eastern literature, it is mentioned as a symbol of beauty and world unity[19].

Also, on ancient ceramics, the goddess Anakhita is often depicted as a pomegranate fruit. There are many images of pomegranate trees in Afrosiyab patterns created in VI-VIII centuries[20].

Like other ethnoses of the world, Uzbeks of the Fergana Valley considered trees as sacred too. In addition, the population of the valley imagined nature, the trees and plants that are an integral part of it, as a god or a fragment that came out of the god. According to the Turkish historian Murat Uroz, the shamans of Altai worshiped the birch tree, considered it more divine than other trees, and held sacrificial ceremonies around it as a symbol of respect[21].

Worshiping trees was different in different nations[22]. As the philosopher Ye. Berezikov admits, the shamans of Altai always carried with them the bark of a white birch tree and a part of it (a leaf or a broken branch) when trying to treat patients. Because they imagined that the white birch tree was sent by the great god Ulgen to the minor god Umay from the heaven, so that their spirit would support them during the religious ceremonies[23]. It should be noted that the birch tree was associated with the spirits of the deceased in Scotland, while it was honored as a symbol of purity in the Baltic and Central Asian nations[24].

The theme of "Tree of Life" takes an important place in the folk crafts of Uzbekistan. The wide spreading of self-supporting constructions such as domes, knobs and arches in local traditional architecture was caused by the scarcity of trees in Central Asia. Juniper and maple trees have been considered sacred since ancient times. For example, according to folk beliefs, the maple tree is the symbolic equivalent of the "Tree of life", which holds the souls of people. Therefore, in some regions of the Fergana valley, planting a maple tree has been considered one of the most meritorious deeds, and the person who planted it was respected by the people for many years. Because the maple tree was valued among the local population for its richness in cool shade and the peculiarity of losing the dampness of the earth[25].

Along with other trees, a **dogrose** is somewhat valued among the inhabitants of the mountainous regions of the Fergana Valley. For example, in some mountainous parts of the valley, on New Year's Eve, the owner of the house hangs a bunch of dogrose on the ceiling. Through this, they believe that dogrose will make it possible to get an abundant harvest from grain crops next year[26]. In the pre-Islamic period, childless women in Khorezm soaked their bodies with tree water in the hope of having a child[27].

Views related to the cult of tree are also found in the traditional way of life of the Uzbek people. Particularly, the Uzbeks of the Fergana Valley believe in the existence of specific "spirits" of the trees such as apricot, walnut, mulberry, willow, oleaster, fig and quince. For example, there is such a tradition among the people of Kushtepa village of Pop district in Namangan region. The house where the newborn child is sleeping is considered a "chilla house" and it is forbidden for anyone to enter this house after dusk. Because, according to folk beliefs, all the evil spirits go for a walk after dusk and may lurk after a person walking on the street at this time. Therefore, a person who comes home after evening should hug a fruit tree three times and then can enter his home. Then the tree can take all the evil spirits who are lurking after that person into itself[28].

As it is in all religious beliefs, shamanism has a positive attitude towards the tree and its components too. We can also see it in the ritual attributes used during shamanic rituals. In particular, Uzbek, Tajik, and Uyghur shamans - use a green switch or wand made from tree branches in the healing process. As V. Basilov noted, powerful and well-known shamans used green switches or wands, and new or weak shamans used ordinary sticks[29].

According to G. P. Snesarev's opinion, the method of healing with a bundle of sticks made of tree branches goes back to Zoroastrianism. In Zoroastrianism, the green switch of wand made from willow was the main means of driving away evil spirits[30]. According to Herodotus, Scythian shamans performed fortune-telling using willow branches and held shamanic ceremonies under the trees[31].

The shamans of the Fergana Valley prepare the green switch in early spring and use it throughout the year, and renew it every year at the same time. The green switches are tied in bundles and hung in the corner of the house where the ceremony is held. The number of sticks in the bundle is forty-one. Bakhshi holds the lower part of the bundle and turns it three times over the patient first from right to left. Then he begins to hit the back of the patient's head and body. This action is performed in order to drive away the evil spirits that have harmed the patient[32]. There was a similar custom in other regions of Uzbekistan, and in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, healers from Samarkand used willow branches to spray liquid on patients. In addition, in Khorezm and Samarkand, the fortune-tellers used seven willow sticks drive away ogres and demons[33].

K. Shaniyozov noted that in Kipchaks, the shaman's stick was made from the branches of oleaster and willow, and it was mainly used during the "exorcizing" ceremony to drive away the evil spirits that entered the patient's body[34].

It can be concluded from the above mentioned information that plants and trees have always been sacred among Uzbeks, like other peoples of the world. The tree was revered not only for its cool shadow, but also as a means of taking the evil spirits in itself. Archaic views related to the tree are common elements in the mythology and ethnography of the peoples of the world, and it has been considered a symbol of fertility and power. The fact that the tree is a symbol of life serves to change the attitude towards it to a more positive side, and the formation of ecological culture in the minds of young people.

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